

MY STORY - TRAPPED ALIVE ON THE OKLAHOMA

By Norm Roberts

Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, we were in our bunk area when they passed the word "take cover". Two minutes later the orders were "man your battle stations". Our battle station (emergency radio room) was next to the after steering room. On the way to our battle station, we were hit by 4 torpedos. There were 6 of us assigned to that station. Their names: Roiland, Smith, Zimmerman, Hannon, Thatcher, and myself. Our emergency lights went out in 2 minutes after we reached our battle station. By this time the ship had started to roll and we decided we had better get out as we had lost all communications. We went up the ladder to go through the carpenter shop, but they had already abandoned ship and left the hatch dogdown from the top. We had no way of escaping.

There were 6 of us there and 12 in the after steering room and 6 in the lucky bay locker who could not escape. We returned to our battle stations. By now, the ship had turned over as far as it could go, so basically we were sitting on the overhead. The ships' lights went out and we had no flashlights. My buddy, Roiland, and I laid on the bottom of a table and tried to open the hatch into the double bottom. The pressure would not allow us to open the hatch. We used matches to see knowing it would burn up oxygen. We got all the dogs secured except one - then we laid back hoping to be rescued.

We would pound out code, but never would receive an answer because there were too many people pounding outside on the hull of the ship which was out of the water. The rescuers thought of using an AC torch to cut holes, but they thought that might burn us up alive. At this time we could hear gun fire and heard the Arizona explode. Water started to come into our battle station. At 10:00 A.M., Monday morning, December 8, they lifted the hatch from our compartment and we could see a light coming into our compartment. We advised the rescuers there were people in the lucky bay locker next to us and also the 12 in the after steering room. Our compartment filled with water 15 minutes after we were rescued. After being rescued they took us to the hospital ship, Solace, where they gave us a shot of brandy and we showered and cleaned up.